What is a facilitator?

The role of facilitator is to act as host, facilitate engagement and to provide challenge and arbitration. For consistency there is usually one facilitator for each project and, preferably, in order to ensure the facilitator is able to act independently they should have no direct interest in the process(es) under review. The facilitator may be appointed from within an organisation or be external to it.

The facilitator is responsible for coordinating all the engagement events and will host some of them. The key responsibility as a facilitator is to create an environment in which the group can be successful in achieving the objectives.

Capabilities of an effective facilitator

- Has a clear understanding of the objectives of the wider project and how engagement events support these.
- Has objectivity and the ability to maintain a neutral position within the group.
- Has the ability to manage a discussion which enables all participants to fairly share their views, without dominating or being disrespectful to others.

Hints and tips

- Be clear about what the sponsor and process owner is seeking to achieve, and whether there are any constraints which may impact on the output of the session(s).
- Agree the numbers of staff who should be involved and what is their role or interest in the process.
- Agree the type of engagement practice that would best deliver the required outcome e.g. workshop, drop in session, survey.
- Select 'tools' that will best help the group reach the desired outcome, such as creating a visual end to end map of the process.
- Use approaches that will enable the participants to share experiences and discuss issues that affect them. If it is a large group consider the use of 'break out' groups to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to put forward their thoughts and ideas. If very large numbers are involved then multiple sessions will be needed.
- Choose an appropriate space in which to hold the event(s), and ensure adequate time is allowed.
- Decide if any communication, other than the invitation, needs to be circulated ahead of the event e.g. programme, agenda, background information, guidance notes.
- At the start of an event introduce the rules for engagement, and check whether participants understand them and are comfortable with them.
- Listen to the conversation and encourage everyone to have their say.
- If conversation strays from the subject and, if the comments are valid, ensure these are recorded but do not be afraid to step in and steer discussions back on track.
- If the conversation requires stimulation, encouragement or reflection, use questioning techniques to enable this to happen.
- Try to ensure that everyone’s contributions are considered and reflected in the ideas and recommendations that emerge.
- Ensure that outcomes, actions and questions are properly recorded, using words that the group recognises as theirs. This will help the group feel ownership of the outputs.
- Finally, thank the participants. Inform them of next steps and the part they can play in any further engagement events.